

Lucilius made me.

Made by Lucius Canuleius, son of Lucius, from Cales.⁴¹

I am from the factory of Lucius Canuleius.

Temporary Employment

The traveling companions in Petronius's *Satyricon*⁴² could not afford to buy and keep a slave, and so they hired a free man when they needed a porter to carry their baggage during the trip. In ancient Rome, porters were also employed to transport on their backs raw materials and consumer products. The work was back-breaking, low-paying, similar to work done by slaves or pack animals, and therefore generally considered undesirable.⁴³ In this selection, the porter is an example of the large class of poor free workers who had no steady employment and probably lived a marginal existence.⁴⁴ Notice, however, that he is careful to remind his employers that he is not a slave.

We hired a man named Corax, who complained constantly about the job and kept putting down our luggage and cursing us for walking too fast and swearing that he would either throw our luggage away or run off with all of it. "What do you think I am?" he said. "A pack animal or a cargo ship? I hired myself out to do the work of a man, not a horse! I'm no less a free man than you people, even if my father did leave me a pauper." And not content with swearing at us, he immediately lifted up his leg and filled the street with the noise and odor of a fart.

Wage and Price Control

By the third century A.D., inflation was wildly out of control. In an attempt to stabilize the economy, the emperor Diocletian fixed a ceiling on wages and prices throughout the whole Roman Empire. At the very beginning of the fourth century, in A.D. 301, he published an edict on maximum prices. Anyone, anywhere in the Empire, who tried to charge or to pay more than the maximum price could be punished by death or exile. However, it proved impossible to enforce the edict and it was finally revoked.

The passages here show but a small sample of the very extensive list of items and services whose prices were controlled by the edict. They allow us, however, some understanding of the standard of living of the lower class. For example, a mule driver or a farmworker had to work one day and a carpenter or a baker had to work half a day in order to earn the money to purchase two pounds of pork.⁴⁵ And a mule driver's

⁴¹Cales: a town in southern Italy.

⁴²traveling companions: see also selections 217 and 233.

⁴³See note 48 of Chapter IX. Our English word "porter" is derived from the Latin *portare* = "to carry."

⁴⁴Compare the use of temporary free workers on farms; see note 180 of this chapter.

⁴⁵The Italian pound weighed about twelve British or American ounces.

boots would cost him five days' wages.⁴⁶ Nowadays even minimum-wage earners can purchase the same amount of pork after just one or two hours of work. The average family of Roman society was far less affluent than the average family of modern American society.

<i>Food Prices</i>		
ITEM	AMOUNT	PRICE
wheat	1 army measure ⁴⁷	100 denarii
barley	1 army measure	60 denarii
rye	1 army measure	60 denarii
millet, ground	1 army measure	100 denarii
millet, whole	1 army measure	50 denarii
beans, ground	1 army measure	100 denarii
beans, not ground	1 army measure	60 denarii
lentils	1 army measure	100 denarii
peas, split	1 army measure	100 denarii
peas, not split	1 army measure	60 denarii
chick-peas	1 army measure	100 denarii
vetch	1 army measure	100 denarii
oats	1 army measure	30 denarii
fenugreek	1 army measure	100 denarii
lupines, raw	1 army measure	60 denarii
lupines, cooked	1 army measure	40 denarii
beans, dried	1 army measure	100 denarii
<i>Wine Prices</i>		
Picene ⁴⁸	1 Italian sextarius ⁴⁹	30 denarii
Tiburtine ⁴⁸	1 Italian sextarius	30 denarii
Sabine ⁴⁸	1 Italian sextarius	30 denarii
Falernian ⁴⁸	1 Italian sextarius	30 denarii
aged wine, first quality	1 Italian sextarius	24 denarii
aged wine, second quality	1 Italian sextarius	16 denarii
vin ordinaire	1 Italian sextarius	8 denarii
<i>Oil Prices</i>		
olive oil, fresh	1 Italian sextarius	40 denarii
olive oil, second quality	1 Italian sextarius	24 denarii

⁴⁶Fine-quality leather boots are still expensive today, although they can be purchased with less than five days' wages. Today, however, we have the advantage of being able to purchase cheaper boots made of synthetic materials. Thus, more people today can afford to have boots.

⁴⁷measure: Latin *modius* = one peck. (There are four pecks in a bushel.)

⁴⁸*Picene, Tiburtine, Sabine, Falernian*: regions of Italy from which the wine came.

⁴⁹*sextarius*: a Roman liquid measure equivalent to about one pint.

vinegar	1 Italian sextarius	6 denarii
liquamen, ⁵⁰ first quality	1 Italian sextarius	16 denarii
liquamen, second quality	1 Italian sextarius	12 denarii
salt	1 army measure	100 denarii
honey, best quality	1 Italian sextarius	40 denarii
honey, second quality	1 Italian sextarius	24 denarii

Meat Prices

pork	1 Italian pound	12 denarii
beef	1 Italian pound	8 denarii
goose, fattened	1 Italian pound	200 denarii
goose, not fattened	1 Italian pound	100 denarii
chicken	1 Italian pound	60 denarii
lamb	1 Italian pound	12 denarii
goat	1 Italian pound	12 denarii

Fish Prices

fish, second quality	1 Italian pound	16 denarii
freshwater fish, first quality	1 Italian pound	12 denarii
freshwater fish, second quality	1 Italian pound	8 denarii

Wages

farm laborer, with meals, daily	25 denarii
painter, walls, with meals, daily	75 denarii
painter, pictures, with meals, daily	150 denarii
carpenter, with meals, daily	50 denarii
baker, with meals, daily	50 denarii
camel driver or donkey driver, with meals, daily	25 denarii
shepherd, with meals, daily	20 denarii
mule driver, with meals, daily	25 denarii
veterinary, for trimming hoofs, per animal	6 denarii
veterinary, for bleeding and cleaning the head, per animal	20 denarii
barber, per man	2 denarii
sewer cleaner, full day's work, with meals, daily	25 denarii
tailor, for cutting and sewing a hooded cloak of first quality	60 denarii
tailor, for cutting and sewing a hooded cloak of second quality	40 denarii
tailor, for breeches	20 denarii
tailor, for heavy stockings	4 denarii

⁵⁰liquamen: fish sauce; see selection 103.

elementary teacher, per boy, monthly	50 denarii ⁵¹
arithmetic teacher, per boy, monthly	75 denarii
grammaticus (Greek or Latin language and literature, geometry), per student, monthly	200 denarii
teacher of rhetoric or public speaking, per student, monthly	250 denarii
teacher of architecture, per boy, monthly	100 denarii
clothing guarder at baths, ⁵² per bather	2 denarii
bath attendant, per bather	2 denarii

Prices For

boots, mule drivers' or farmworkers' first quality, without hobnails	120 denarii
boots, soldiers', without hobnails	100 denarii
shoes, patrician	150 denarii
shoes, senatorial	100 denarii
shoes, equestrian	70 denarii
boots, women's	60 denarii

The Grain Dole

The population of the city of Rome in the early imperial period was about one million. Some people had been forced to move to the city to seek employment when slave laborers had replaced them on the farms.⁵³ Others were attracted to the city because it was the political, financial, and entertainment capital of the Western world. And some people were brought to Rome as slaves but remained there as freedmen. Jobs were increasingly more difficult to find, and slaves and freedmen occupied many positions which, in another society, would be filled by free citizens of the lower class. In general, the life of the lower-class urban worker was harsh. Wages were low, prices were high, and jobs were sometimes only temporary. Free workers had no job security, no retirement benefits, no medical plans, and no unemployment insurance. Indeed, some free workers led harsher lives than some slaves, who were fed, clothed, and given medical care by their masters. Some people, both free and freed, therefore attached themselves to patrons who might help them along with gifts or money. Unfortunately, some patrons expected their clients to grovel in return for a handout.⁵⁴ The state provided welfare assistance in the form of a grain dole. In 122 B.C., Gaius Gracchus, a tribune,⁵⁵ brought forward a law to insure a low and unvarying grain price for Roman citizens. The government was to maintain a supply of

⁵¹ An elementary teacher thus needed at least 15 students in order to earn as much as a mule-driver.

⁵² A bather might bring his own slave to guard his clothes while he was bathing, or he might hire someone at the baths. On public baths, see selection 354.

⁵³ See selection 187.

⁵⁴ See selections 10-14.

⁵⁵ *tribune*: an elected public official; see selections 255-257. On Gaius Gracchus and his brother Tiberius, see selection 187.